

Join the Movement: The 2.5% Commitment

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The 2.5% Commitment: Every academic library should commit to contribute 2.5% of its total budget to support the common infrastructure needed to create the open scholarly commons.

A number of things came at me at in late summer.

- In July, Kalev Leetaru concluded an [article on Sci-Hub in Forbes](#) (who would have thought?) by saying in reference to academic research, “In the Internet era information will be free, the only question remaining is who pays for that freedom.” I started using the quote as the tag line on my e-mail signature.
- Elsevier bought Bepress for \$115 million.
- I am a member of the DSpace Steering Group and we were trying to raise the last 15% of our \$250K membership goal. We were doing OK, but it was a tough slog.
- A colleague gave me [a College & Research Libraries article by John Wenzler](#) that argues that academic libraries face the dilemma of collective action. This Wenzler claim is why journal prices are so high and by extension it will make creating the open scholarly commons difficult at best, and maybe impossible.

I was depressed. I thought there has to be a better way. Raising money to support common infrastructure like DSpace was like pulling teeth. Elsevier has more money than God, much of which it gets from academic libraries, and buys control of our infrastructure whenever it pleases. The obvious answer to Leetaru’s question, at least for me, was that academic libraries are going to pay to make academic research free, because that is what we do. Unfortunately, there is a good scholarly argument that we don’t have it within ourselves to do what needs to be done.

So, I wrote a short paper, [“The 2.5% Commitment,”](#) which included a plan. It was therapeutic. The plan was to establish a norm for academic library contributions to common infrastructure. I set the norm as a contribution of 2.5% of the total library budget. I did so because I figured the academic library community needed to raise at least what Elsevier paid for Bepress annually to do what needs to be done. Since U.S. academic libraries spend about \$7 billion annually, and if we can get 60% of what we propose as the goal, then what we need is 2.5%. In other words, I pulled the 2.5% out of the air. I sent the paper to a dozen or so colleagues. One wrote back and said he was thinking along similar lines and proposed we do something about it. So began the movement.

A version of the paper was posted as part of the SPARC list discussion of the Elsevier Bepress purchase and it got a strong response. Further discussion was proposed and there will be discussions of the proposal at several upcoming meetings — the Lyrasis Membership Summit, CNI, and ALA Midwinter. A small group is working to advance the idea. The first step is to hash out what should count as a contribution, which unsurprisingly is not straight forward. Lots of people have different opinions. We



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are developing an [initial version of an instrument](#) and will test it in the coming month or two. We hope to get some idea of how much academic libraries now contribute to support open infrastructure and content, which we don't now know. This will tell us whether 2.5% is a realistic goal or is aspirational or whether it can be raised. You can keep track of how this project is going at our [website](#).

In the future, we would hope to have a defined way of measuring contribution to open infrastructure and content, and an easy to use tool to do so. We would hope that the percentage contribution would be reported as a standard academic library statistic to ACRL, ARL and others. We would hope that there would be a norm established around contribution and that this in turn would mean more money for the common resources we need. We hope this norm can be established in a way that presidents and provosts will support. We hope we can prove Wenzler wrong and demonstrate that we can look beyond our narrow self-interest and act for the common good.

The 2.5% Commitment is a movement, not an organization or an institution. To be part of the movement all you have to do is commit your library to doing its fair share. Start by looking at your budget and seeing what your percentage contribution to open infrastructure and content is. You can look at our current thinking about what should count, or use your best judgement. Reflect on whether you should contribute more and what is the best way for you to do so. Talk to your colleagues and peers. Lobby the library groups you participate in to join the movement together. Hold each other accountable.

In his [BOAI 15 paper](#) Jean-Claude Gu  don described a future for academic libraries that I believe is what we should be aiming for:

In the end, libraries can point out the fact that their future role actually points in two, apparently opposite, yet deeply complementary directions: on the one hand, they plunge deeply into the local production scenes since they aim at systematically sweeping, storing, preserving, and curating all that is produced in their hosting institution; at the same time, the libraries, with their sister institutions, are involved in the task of ensuring a vibrant knowledge-nurturing life for their documents: they will circulate, be discoverable, be interoperable, be evaluated, etc. With the first function, each library ensures its safe and strong function within its host institution; with the second function, the libraries connect to bring the knowledge infrastructure that we all really need.

Without a robust common open infrastructure that the academic library community controls, we cannot achieve this future.

At the end of the day, if we don't collectively invest in the infrastructure we need for the open scholarly commons, it will not get built or it will only be haphazardly half built. A 2.5% commitment will require some reallocation, but every academic library can do it if they choose.

It is time to get started. It is time to join the movement.